

# A STUDY ON THE NATURE OF LEARNING BEHAVIOUR PATTERN AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

By  
SANTOSHI HALDER\*

### ABSTRACT

*Tides of changes in the world economy, transportation and communication are resulting in increased levels of interdependence among individuals, groups, organizations and society as a whole. Students can be from diverse cultures, ethnic groups, language groups and religions, as well as from different economic social classes and ability levels. At the same time there are differences between disciplines or course of study in teaching and learning, which creates patterns of interaction that result in diversity, being valued or rejected and impact on the kind of attitudes and values one develops. When varied students are brought together, whether the diversity results in positive or negative outcomes depend largely on how learning situations are structured; competitively, individualistically or cooperatively. While India is undergoing a particularly turbulent time, it has become prime requirement to inculcate in the young minds the values of cooperative learning. With these theoretical assumptions the author of the present study aimed at exploring the nature of learning behavior pattern (cooperative, competitive and individualistic) among the post graduate students of the three major disciplines of the selected State aided Universities of West Bengal. Data has been collected from 180 randomly selected university students. The statistical treatment has been restricted to ANOVA and t-test. Data based facts highlighted the following facts: (i) the students were found to be highly inclined towards cooperative learning attitude; (ii) Science students were found to be most cooperative in terms of learning attitudes and comparatively arts students were found to be least cooperative; (iii) Science and commerce students were almost uniformly inclined towards competitive learning attitudes than arts students; (iv) Male and female students showed no significant difference in the nature of learning behavior attitudes (cooperative, competitive, individualistic). The contribution of the present study lies foremost in the emphasis of considering the significance of creating practical situations for the implication of the student's cooperative learning behavioral patterns through the core curriculum in the educational institutes.*

### INTRODUCTION

Though helping students to learn better would appear to be a straightforward goal, it needs careful analytical vision on the part of the teachers, curriculum constructors, educational administrators and planners to frame the whole from the perspective of the students. There are many ways and aspects of perceiving 'teaching and learning' (Fry, 2003). Student's interaction pattern or students interpersonal relation is perhaps one of the most neglected aspects of teaching and learning, causing tremendous impact on the immediate outcome and as well as on the further consequences (Knutson, 2001). The predominant method of teaching in our educational institutes merely enables student to develop skill to engage in acquiring knowledge through their study

material. The most ignored aspect of teaching is that little time is devoted for creating a stimulating environment where knowledge can be created and values can be developed through student interaction patterns within the educational institute and the curriculum framework (Yaram, H. 2005). Values enshrined from childhood become inherent in the young mind and later on take its own course influencing every arena. It is in fact one of the most important aspect of instruction where students learn to work with different personality traits, recognize and develop healthy values, and skills of accepting each other which will help them to sustain and develop better in this competitive yet progressive world, and at the same time keeping their own uniqueness intact.

There are three basic ways of how students can interact

with each other as they learn. They are: 1) They can *compete* to see who is 'superior'; 2) they can work *individualistically* toward a goal without paying attention to other student's failure or success; or 3) they can work *cooperatively* with a vested interest in each other's learning as well as their own (Owens and Straton, 1980, Owens and Barnes, 1992; Crozier, 1997). Of the three interaction patterns, competition is presently the most dominant (Johnson and R. Johnson, 1991). This competitive expectation is already widespread when students enter school and grow stronger as they progress through school into their respective profession. The fact can be substantiated, if we closely analyze today's younger generation in different work force; be in a business organization, a call centre job or any industries or even the day-to-day life situations.

## Disciplinary differences

In schools and colleges the primary source of learning is the discipline or the course content. Disciplines are classically defined as domains of knowledge that include specialized vocabularies and accepted theories, systematic research strategies with techniques for replication and validation (Dressel and Mayhew, 1974). The learning tasks for students in physical and social sciences and the humanities thus differ considerably, and students adopt a different approach in order to be successful in each of them (Donald, 1999; 2000; and Dubuc, 1999). Several studies indicate that there are differences between fields of learning which impact on the kind of attitudes and values (cooperative, competitive, individualistic) one develops. Although not all of these differences may be due to genuine characteristics of disciplines (Jens-Christian Smeby 1996; Riding, and Rayner, 1998). Academics identify strongly with their subject discipline (Neumann, 2001). Disciplinary differences affect academic identity (e.g. Becher, 1989; Smeby, 1996) and which cause impact on the overall performance. Thus differences may be subjective and owe more to the working styles of individual academics than to genuine disciplinary differences (Smeby, 1996), Bo Heffler (2001) found significant differences between learning styles with respect to gender.

## Cooperative learning

Without the cooperation of its members society cannot survive, and the society of man has survived because of the cooperation of its members that made survival possible. It was not an advantageous individual here and there who did so, but the group. In human societies the individuals who are most likely to survive are those who are best enabled to do so by their group. (Ashley Montagu, 1965)

There is a long history of research on cooperative, competitive, and individualistic efforts (Johnson, D.W., and Johnson, R., 1989). Cooperative learning is one of the most remarkable and fertile areas of theory, research, and practice in education. Voluminous research have compared cooperative learning to various control methods on a broad range of measures and now there is no second thought on the fact regarding the positive effect of cooperative learning pattern and attitudes not only in academics but also other diverse aspects of every day life situations (Cohen and Lotan, 1997; Sharan and Sharan, 1992, Slavin, 1991). Research clearly indicates possible advantages of cooperation over competitive and individualistic efforts; (a) higher achievement and greater productivity; (b) more caring, supportive, and committed relationships; and (c) greater psychological health, social competence, and self-esteem. The positive impact of cooperation over others emphasizes educators to take cooperative learning one of the most valuable tools of education (Deutsch, 1962; Johnson and Johnson, 1974, 1989, 1999; Cohen, 1994; Maruyama, 1983; Kohn, 1992; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1991; SaponShevin, Ayres, and Duncan 1994). So in a country like India, where every day we have to study, work, interact and live together with so much diverse population it becomes a necessity that the values of cooperative learning be infused in the learner from a very early age for possible positive outcomes.

Most of the countries in the west do consider its importance and they are trying and also have already implemented such efforts in the school and college core curriculum (Puma, Jones, Rock, and Fernandez, 1993). Efforts of incorporating cooperative learning activities

have taken place in every major subject, at all grade levels, in all types of schools in many countries in the west (Cohen, 1994; Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1977). In India it seems that as if we still don't acknowledge the significance and importance of such a broad and important area of instruction. There are many important questions in research on this topic, and a great deal of development and evaluation remains to be done.

## Emergence of the Problem

From the perspective of faculty, learning is a matter of disciplinary knowledge and methods of inquiry, but the expectations of students differ across disciplines. Students from different disciplinary backgrounds sometimes differ from one another in their learning style preferences (Jens-Christian Smeby, 1996; Riding, and Rayner, 1998). Pluralism and diversity among students create an opportunity, but like all opportunities, there are potentially either positive or negative outcomes. Each type of interdependence (cooperative, competitive, individualistic) teaches a set of values and creates patterns of interaction that result in diversity being valued or rejected.

In today's environment it has become an obligation to inculcate in the young minds the concept of '*learning to live together*' which can come with the values of cooperation. The teaching - learning process in the various disciplines (arts, science, and commerce) includes different syllabus, differences in the practical vis-a-vis theoretical part and there are also differences in the method of teaching the course. An important part of the day and the most crucial stage and years of the students are spent in 'learning' the course content of the particular discipline the student chooses after class X in an educational environment among peers and teachers. In humanities or arts and commerce the major portion of the curriculum is theoretical based and mostly based on class notes. There is no scope for practical approach and students rarely get a chance within the curriculum to work in groups or in cooperation with each other. The curriculum and the exam-oriented way of teaching and learning infuse in them the importance of being

competitive and individualistic to sustain in this competitive world. Students thus adopt the exam-oriented learning attitude and pattern from the very initial stage and they hardly comprehend the subject matter. In science stream, although the overall picture is same, the practical based subject students get a chance to work in small or large heterogeneous or homogeneous groups. Thus, there are still a lot of scope for interaction with each other in close proximity apart from taking class notes or being just theoretical learners. It can be an important explorative research topic to find whether there is any noted difference in learning patterns in the students from different disciplines because of the differences in the course and syllabus and as well as the way it is taught. Also, what can be done from the point of view of the curriculum constructors is a promising area for research.

## Objectives of the study

With these theoretical assumptions by the author, the present study was conducted with the following objectives:

- To identify the type of learning behavior attitude (co-operative, competitive and individualistic) among the university students.
- To identify the nature of learning behavior attitude (co-operative, competition and individualistic) of the university students in terms of academic discipline (arts, science, commerce).
- To identify the nature of learning behavior attitude (co-operative, competition and individualistic) of the university students in terms of gender.

## Hypothesis

The major hypotheses taken for the present study under investigation are:

- 1) There is no significant difference in the nature of learning behavior attitudes (cooperative, competitive, individualistic) of the University students with respect to academic disciplines (arts, science, commerce)
- 2) There is no significant difference in the nature of learning behavior attitudes (cooperative, competitive, individualistic) of the University students



with respect to gender (male and female)

## Samples

Data has been collected from 180 university students from different campuses of Calcutta University, Kalyani University and Rabindra Bharati University from three broad disciplines namely arts, science and commerce. The sample was selected by stratified sampling technique. The sample consisted of heterogeneous mass of students in terms of locality (rural, urban and semi urban), caste (mainly Hindu, Muslim, Christian), class (lower, upper and middle class), though few students were from other states but mainly most of them were Bengali. The mean age being 23 years. The final average response rate was 180 University students (60 arts, 60 science and 60 commerce). Total 90 females and 90 males answered the questionnaires. The data were tested for normal distribution. This study is a result of a pilot study for partial fulfillment of a major Project work.

## Tools

The tools used for this study were:

(a) General Information schedule (GIS)

(b) Learning behavior attitude inventory (Co-operative, competitive and individualistic) for university students-Ray and Halder (2006). The test was standardized for reliability and validity. The test-retest reliability coefficient is .79 and the validity coefficient of the scale is .83.

## Statistical treatment

The statistical treatment has been restricted to Mean, S.D, ANOVA and t-test. Findings have been supported with qualitative analysis. (Table. 1 and 2)

## Findings and discussion

Learning patterns are individual preferences and tendencies that influence learning and performance (Smith, 1982). There can be a strong relationship between learning attitudes and motivation to learn, involvement in learning activities, attitudes towards instructors, and self efficacy (Jahnsan and Jahnsan, 1978). Therefore, learning patterns may be an important variable that influences the educational program. There are many different learning preferences described in the literature.

Variables	Mean and S.D among University students					
	Total students N=180	Total Male N=90	Total Female N=90	Arts N=60	Science N=60	Commerce N=60
Cooperative N=20	M=28.61 S.D=3.32	M=28.90 S.D=3.30	M=28.32 S.D=3.33	M=27.50 S.D=3.32	M=29.95 S.D=4.40	M=28.37 S.D=5.95
Competitive N=20	M=24.88 S.D=4.40	M=24.48 S.D=4.41	M=25.29 S.D=4.37	M=27.55 S.D=3.85	M=23.47 S.D=4.22	M=23.63 S.D=3.89
Individualistic N=20	M=25.06 S.D=5.95	M=24.82 S.D=6.04	M=25.29 S.D=5.87	M=27.26 S.D=5.15	M=23.00 S.D=5.51	M=24.9 S.D=6.41

Table 1. Mean (M), Standard Deviation (S.D), for Learning Behavior pattern inventory (Cooperative, competitive, individualistic) of the University students of the three Disciplines (arts, science, and commerce)

Variables	'F' value			't' value		
	Main effect gender	Main effect discipline	Interactive effect Gender vs discipline	Arts vs science	Science vs commerce	Commerce vs arts
Cooperative	F=1.43 P=0.23	F=9.14* P=0.00	F=0.37 P=0.69	t=-4.41* P=0.00	t=2.92** P=0.00	t=1.67NS P=0.10
Competitive	F=1.87 P=0.17	F=20.27* P=0.00	F=1.27 P=0.29	t=5.08** P=0.00	t=-0.21NS P=0.84	t=-5.66** P=0.00
Individualistic	F=0.30 P=0.39	F=8.33* P=0.00	F=0.63 P=0.54	t=4.41** P=0.00	t=-1.68** P=0.09	t=-2.31** P=0.024

\*\* Significant at .01 level

\* Significant at .05 level

NS Not Significant

Table 2. 'F' ratio (Two Way ANOVA) and 't' test values for Learning Behavior pattern inventory (Cooperative, competitive, individualistic) of the University students of the three Disciplines (arts, science, commerce)

This study investigated cooperative, competitive and individualized learning patterns.

The findings are as follows:

- There is no significant difference in the nature of learning behavior attitudes (cooperative, competitive, individualistic) of the University students with respect to academic disciplines (arts, science, commerce). (Table 2)
- There is no significant difference in the nature of learning behavior attitudes (cooperative, competitive, individualistic) of the University students with respect to gender (male and female). (Table 2)
- There is significant difference between the arts and science students in respect to cooperative learning attitude. (Table 2)

- There is significant difference between the science and commerce students in respect to cooperative learning attitude. (Table 2)
- There is no significant difference between the commerce and arts students in respect to cooperative learning attitude. (Table 2)
- There is significant difference between the arts and science students in respect to competitive learning attitude. (Table 2)
- There is significant difference between the commerce and arts and science students in respect to competitive learning attitude. (Table 2)
- There is no significant difference between the science and commerce students in respect to competitive learning attitude. (Table 2)
- There is significant difference between the arts and science students in respect to individualistic learning attitude. (Table 2)
- There is significant difference between the commerce and science students in respect to individualistic learning attitude. (Table 2)
- There is significant difference between the commerce and arts students in respect to individualistic learning attitude. (Table 2)

The findings of the present study dispel the myth that students do not want to work cooperatively, but on contrary they are interested in collaborative group works within the curriculum. Although the learning patterns measured in the present study were just the perceived learning attitudes of the students and not the actual learning pattern they indulge while learning. To determine the actual learning pattern, students need to be assessed in a real classroom situation. Students were found to be genuinely interested in sharing and cooperating with each other. Students showed competitive attitudes due to the competitive demands of modern life situations, but just being competitive can't be taken as being non-cooperative with peers. Student's proneness towards cooperation as well as competition is a healthy attitude among students for learning.

However, our present education system doesn't create

and offer stimulating environment for the implication of such healthy collaborative efforts. The primary paradigm at universities is the lecture method combined with a competitive assessment process involving individual exams graded on a curve. Thus, the students are bound to learn within the prescribed stereotype curriculum individualistically, without exploring their age old inherent social instinct. Students in schools and colleges get exposure in the form of co-curricular activities where they get a chance to know the heterogeneity among themselves but in higher education they rarely get a chance to cohere even academically or in any other ways. In science streams, students get ample of scope for interactive tasks but in commerce and arts stream due to the theoretically-based, notes-driven classes students do not get any platform to intermingle with each others which creates an invisible wall on their mental horizon. They hardly learn to know or value about the existing diversity and plurality. The existing plurality and diversity of our Indian society can be used to bring about positive outcomes among the student community. Three types of social interdependence cooperation, competition and individualism influence either positive or negative outcomes among students from diversified background. This does not mean that competitive and individualistic efforts should be discouraged, but rather they should be taught the inherent values of all the three patterns in such a way so that knowingly or unknowingly the values will become a part and parcel of life (Johnson and Johnson, 1993). Out of the three characteristics traits, cooperative learning should be encouraged for the future well-being of students as well as the society through which we are undergoing in the present era.

Irrespective of disciplines, all the students showed high cooperative learning attitudes, but among competitive learners marked difference was noted between the three disciplines. Individualistic learners also showed prominent disciplinary differences. Thus, it can be significantly indicated that different disciplinary differences like the course content, syllabus, method of teaching etc., do have impact on the kind of learning patterns the students incorporate (Donald, 1999; 2000; and Dubuc, 1999;

Jens-Christian Smeby 1996; Riding and Rayner, 1998). Further research and exploration with related components is needed in order to substantially and scientifically prove or disprove particular phenomena.

The current debate in education is focused on how we can help students to be successful both academically and socially. Students' learning goals may be structured to promote cooperative, competitive, or individualistic efforts from the initial years of schooling. Cooperative learning is a personal philosophy, not just a classroom technique. In all situations where people come together in groups, it suggests a way of dealing with people which respects and highlights individual group member's abilities and contributions (Panitz 1997; Johnson, Johnson and Halubec 1990; Felder 1997). Teachers, curriculum designers and educational planners have to keep in mind that there is a difference between simply having students work in a group and structuring groups of students to work cooperatively. Putting students into groups does not necessarily gain a cooperative relationship; it has to be structured and managed properly by the teachers. A cooperative learning group has to have the following essential elements in order to fruitfully impart its worth, they are: (a) Positive interdependence; (b) Face-to-face interaction; (c) Individual and group accountability; (d) Interpersonal and small group skills; (e) Group processing (Johnson and Johnson, 1993). It is time for the discrepancy to reduce the gap between what research indicates is effective in teaching and what teachers actually do.

In its fullest conception, cooperative learning provides a radically different approach to instruction, whose possibilities have been trapped only on a limited basis in India. Time has now come that we have to make cooperative learning a part of core curriculum in our 'teaching and learning' and find out practical ways to seed the young minds of our students. The significance of cooperative learning becomes a matter of concern even for preventing and alleviating many of the social problems faced globally by children, adolescents, and young adults.

### Conclusion

In general, university students were found to be highly inclined towards cooperative learning attitude. Science students were found to be most cooperative in terms of learning attitudes and comparatively arts students were found to be least cooperative. But science and commerce students were almost uniformly inclined towards competitive learning attitudes than arts students. Arts students showed uniform tri-directional learning behavior attitudes (Cooperative, competitive, individualistic) without much difference which itself is an indication that their inclination towards learning attitudes is not beyond criticism. Male and female students showed no significant difference in the nature of learning behavior attitudes cooperative, (competitive, individualistic).

### Applied value of the study

The contribution of the present study lies foremost in the emphasis on the importance of considering the significance of cooperative learning behavior pattern, and at the same time, creating situations for practical implication of the inherent values of cooperative learning in the context of present day learning situation. With the result of globalization people tend to be more individualistic in their way of thinking in every day life situations and collaboration is becoming extinct in today's world but is the most needed one. Everybody is thinking of personal benefit and gain. Variety of talents and ability gets channelized negatively which can be utilized in a significant way. Yet, people may not have the needed knowledge and skills to perform their tasks in interdisciplinary and geographically dispersed teams. Considering the lack of efforts providing an educational program on collaboration in universities, content based on learning style preferences may be helpful in developing more effective values of collaboration among the students. Further, knowledge of learning style preferences may help to increase our understanding of cognitive processes in collaboration because different learning style modes process information differently (James and Gardner, 1995). The more students care about each other, the harder they will work to achieve



mutual learning goals. Long-term and persistent efforts to achieve do not come from the head; they come from the heart (Johnson and Johnson, 1993). If thought scientifically and applied practically; the values of cooperative learning can prove miracles resulting in not only individualistic success and personal gain but also the progress of the society as a whole. The values of cooperative learning could be used for preventing and treating a wide variety of social problems such as diversity (racism, sexism, inclusion of handicapped), anti-social behavior (delinquency, drug abuse, bullying, violence, incivility), lack of pro-social values and egocentrism, alienation and loneliness, psychological pathology, low self-esteem, and many more. Students are the builders of the nation. Teachers with their innovative ways of teaching and learning can infuse such tasks in students so that the students can practically work on developing cooperative and collaborative values which are the need of the hour.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

\* Lecturer, Department of Education, Calcutta University.

The author is lecturer in the Department of Education, Calcutta University. She is pursuing her research in the field of applied psychology. Her research interests include Educational psychology, Educational Technology & Special Education. At present she is looking forward towards some projects from UGC & RCI, and is also working on a book on Educational Technology.

